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# THE MINISTRY OF A CHILD



# THE MINISTRY OF A CHILD

## A BOOK OF VERSES

by

*Full.*  
Martha Foote Crow



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## TO AGATHA

(O that she may know!)

And to those dear friends who were with me  
during her short and beautiful life;

And to those of my women friends into  
whose hands this book of verses, with my love,  
shall come;

And to that great friend, who though she  
never knew Agatha, yet cherishes her memory  
as tenderly as though she had known her;

And to those whose gentle hands have helped  
to fashion and print the small volume:

This book, which is a little story in verse,  
is, with undying remembrance and affection,  
dedicated.

M. F. C.



## FATHERHOOD

My father dear, the splendor of thine eyes  
Was as a beacon in the storm and stress  
Of my young days; I saw thee then address  
Thyself for battle, unknown potencies  
To face; the future thou didst pawn, didst prize  
Emblazonment of fame and the caress  
Of the world's sweet and subtle favor, less  
Than humble crust with living true and wise!  
Truth thou hast passionately loved, the voice  
Within listened intently, wast not blind  
To the faint, shining footsteps' print that wooed  
To chase a vanishing ideal. Thy choice  
Deliberate was this, and thou didst find  
A narrow place on earth but heavenly food!

This banqueting thou tenderly didst call  
On me to share. Thy message was to burn  
The treasure-laden ships behind, to spurn  
The coward's invitation to enthrall

The active mind by brooding over all  
Mistakes of vanished days, and thus to earn  
The fellowship of spirits great that yearn  
To right the wrong and rescue those that fall.  
So when the lesson hard for me was set,  
Thine eyes' sad majesty was my command;  
Thy gentle greatness was the power beguiled  
Me following after thy sure step. And yet  
My heart, dear father, ne'er did understand  
Thy heart, until God gave to me a child !

I



## TO ANGELO

Thine ardent eyes look o'er the crystal wall,  
Sweet Angelo!  
They brim with light, they love, they long;  
In their mysterious depths the wish to roam  
Burns with a changeless glow. O come, I call,  
Sweet Angelo, come!

I dream thou'rt come. That flashing joy so near,  
Sweet Angelo,  
My hand unworthy shades away lest blind  
I grow. Thy nestling fingers white as foam  
Hurt sore; thy brow's expanse strikes fear;  
Yet—Angelo, come!

Is't true that pain and love in thee must meet,  
Sweet Angelo?  
Then come, dear pain, and make love drain  
The heart for once, and strike this crying dumb;  
And come, dear love, make pain more swiftly  
fleet;  
Come, Angelo, come!

Come on the swiftest sun-ray, and flash out,  
Sweet Angelo,  
The light's unfearing smile! Strike through  
the blue,  
And bring its love-tint to thy waiting home,  
And with unflinching gaze put wrong to rout!  
Come, Angelo, come!

## THE CONFLICT

I would be sad—

And yet I cannot be, I must be glad!

Within my heart goes on a mimic war;  
On come the soul's trained passions, battle-  
fired,

Pale Reason leading, calm as morning star.

To meet them sweeping down comes, unattired  
For battle and unmarshalled and unled,  
A horde of conquering instincts strong and  
fleet,

In robes of heavenly brightness habited,  
With voices trumpet-toned yet silvery sweet,  
And glances that compel like lightning swift.  
And when this overwhelming host she sees,  
Like broadening sun-rays through the cloud's  
wide rift,

Reason with all her forces turns and flees!

And so although I would be sad,  
I must be glad.

## THE VOICE

First time that deep and sweet and tender thrill  
Reached to my heart, as though swift lightning  
          flashed

On a black night, a waiting world to spy,  
The pulses of my being all stood still!  
Before the awful truth I stood abashed;  
      " Fear not, O mother,"  
Spake a voice; " Sweet mother, it is I!"

Fear not! It is the archangel's voice again.  
Fear not! O hear the welcoming, warning word  
Speaks in that touch within my being's core,  
And trumpets to my hope: " Fear not! To men  
Comes help—but to thy heart a sword!  
      And yet, fear not,  
But think of me, sweet mother, evermore!"

Sweet mother! Ah that infinite tender word  
Lures tears into my eyes, prayer to my heart;  
Brings joy that ne'er before was dreamed to be!  
Welcome and blessings on thee, friendly sword,  
Though through my outmost soul thy piercings  
      dart!

      Ah listen, heart,  
And hear again, " Sweet mother, think of me!"

Sometimes when whelmèd in a sea of cares,  
When faith storm-blinded, drenched and dumb,  
Scarcely the guiding finger still can see,  
Fails courage 'neath the burden that she bears,  
I feel thy present comfort gently come

Unfailing ;—" Mother,  
Think of me, O mother, think of me !"

When unscaled mountains awful rise before,  
Abysses darkling yawn 'neath black-browed  
peaks,

Dangers unnamed await, and cruelly  
A scourging duty urges more and more,—  
Thy gentle sweet reminder softly speaks:

" Brave heart, O mother !  
'Tis for me, sweet mother, 'tis for me !"

And when my weighted love gaily sent forth,  
Dismantled, haggard, worn and sad returns,  
And all my poured-out treasures scorned I see,  
My sacred hoardings counted little worth,  
Thy voice within my heart unfailing burns:

" I am here, O mother !  
Think of me, sweet mother, think of me !"

When solitude unutterable surrounds  
Amid the vexed and rushing city throng,  
With them I chase a thing I cannot see,  
Moved by some potent impulse that astounds  
My judgment,— then like undertone of song,  
    I hear,—“O mother, turn,  
And think of me, sweet mother, think of me!”  
  
And e’en among choice friends whose clasping  
    hands  
I many weary years have longed to take,  
Whose loving eyes’ response have longed to  
    see,  
Thy touch my inmost heart quickly demands,—  
“Nearer than all of these for love’s dear sake  
    Am I, O mother!  
Think of me, sweet mother, think of me!”

## THE RESPONSE

I bow before thy pure and kingly claim,  
Thou whose young crown of sunlight-raying  
hair

I yet have never seen and ne'er may see;  
Thou whose unspoken heavenly-royal name  
My untrained ear not yet to hear could bear;  
Of thee, dear one,  
I think; sweet one, I think of thee!

I'll think of thee, thou well-spring of my joy,  
Heart of my heart, until the appointed hour—  
More near than ever chosen one can be!  
No day can be so darkened with annoy  
But that thy bidding shall have power  
O'er me. Dear one,  
I'll think of thee; sweet one, I'll think of thee.

And if I never see thy darling face,  
Ne'er read within thine eyes the heavenly lore,  
Never by thy child-love uplifted be,  
Ever shall ache thy waiting unfilled place;  
Still shall my spirit bound forevermore  
Be to thine own;  
While life shall last, dear one, I'll think of thee.

And more—the thrill thy vivid heart-beat sends  
E'en to my heart speaks of immortal years,  
As heaven's broad rim in dewdrop's round we  
see.

'Tis joy, 'tis life thy living presence lends;  
Thy life shall conquer death, shall conquer  
tears.

Thy life, dear one,  
Forevermore, sweet one, I live with thee.

Yes, through eternity's long day unflecked,  
Where infinite joys await beyond, above,  
And God's clear smile in peace unveiled we see,  
And pain long since endured is little recked,  
No angel love can win me from thy love ;

Forever mine, dear one,  
While eons onward swing I'll think of thee !

## THE HUMAN CRY

The morning sunlight broods upon the polished  
mere ;

The multitudinous shoals of fishes swarm,  
Or fickle dart beneath the shadowy pier,  
As stricken by swift impulse of alarm.

Down where the slime clings to the green-  
fringed stake,  
I see a glittering thing, a bubble, start  
And quiver, then a dainty spiral take,  
And to the ether as if homeward dart.

O life! do we as bubbles blindly whirled  
In spirals, through enveloping darkness move,  
Only in vastness empty to be hurled  
And lost in unimagined space above?

But, heart, who made the spiral motion rare,  
Springing unwilling from ooze beneath the  
flood?

Who lifted that blue-ceiled expanse of air,  
Drawing us upward? Help us, help, O God!

## A NIGHT THOUGHT

Alone I list the haunting terror of the night ;  
The speaking clock-tick, and the melancholy drip  
Of rain-drops on the shingles, and the swishing slip  
Of branches 'gainst the eaves, like robes of ghosts  
affright.

I hear the twitter of the swallow birdlings sweet,  
Stirring in comfort soft beneath the downy breast  
Of the warm mother-bird within their chimney  
nest.

In their bird language mystic comes her answer  
meet.

O mother mine, beneath the rain-soaked leaves  
long laid ;

O father far, and childhood past, and sweet love  
gone ;

O hope delayed, and risk and ruth and fruitless  
moan—

Ah God, were I a bird, nestling and unafraid !

## SONGS IN THE NIGHT

Soft melody moves nightly o'er me,  
Tender and sweet;  
Now swiftly hurrying on before me  
With airy feet;  
Now floating almost to my lips,  
As downward bird-flight smoothly dips  
With movement fleet.

And now I hear the music fading  
Into the sky,  
With might my very soul persuading  
With it to fly;  
And yet a sweet tone strangely blends,—  
Can it be mother's voice that lends  
The melody?

Why do I see her sweet eyes beaming  
Out of the dark?  
Why do old childhood thoughts come stealing  
Over me? Hark!  
'Tis now from heaven a mystic strain—  
'Tis now her voice, with bliss and pain  
Clearly I mark.

Yes, song that all the night goes ringing,  
    Thou'rt lullaby;  
The strain I hear her dear voice singing  
    Is lullaby.  
O mother dear, with radiant brow,  
Shall I be loved as thou, as thou  
    Sing lullaby?

## LULLABY-DAYS.

Lullaby-days, for you I wait  
With joy, with fear, in doubtful state ;  
    The dreaded, longed-for heavenly boon  
    That if it come at highest noon  
Or dawn or midnight, still comes late.

Shall not my questionings cease debate,  
My sad heart stop its war with fate,  
    When once I hear thy magic tune,  
    Lullaby-days?

And shall not love dissolve all hate,  
And hope and fear together mate?  
    I list the answer—a baby's croon !  
    Ah, sweetest time, come soon, come soon;  
Bring me that song from heaven's gate,  
    Lullaby-days !

## THE LAST HOUR

I wandered in a land of shadows, pressed  
By shapes of horror, clutched and hurt and torn,  
Yet struggling ever on, until outworn  
And spent, from dim Beyond an angel blest  
Brought thee, dear one, and gave thee to my  
breast.—

Then came old Death and clasped me. Most  
forlorn

Of the dark shapes was he; his kiss was born  
Of sharpest sword-thrust and of heavenliest  
Sweet balm. But when he saw thy regal form,  
Whose very weakness was its sceptered law,  
He shuddered, turned, and swiftly fled away;  
And all the hideous troop like spending storm  
Sped after into darkness. Then I saw  
'Twas thou, sweet guest, would lead me back  
to day!

## FIRST BABY SONG

Come, little dove,  
Come over in the nest !  
Come, little nestling,  
Come to mother's breast !  
Cry not, O cry not,  
There's coming pain enough !  
Alas, my bairnie,  
The ways of life are rough !

Sleep, darling bairn,  
Thy mother's heart beats near;  
Cuddle warmly down  
And never dream of fear.  
Wake not, O wake not,  
Stay one moment more;  
Give, O give this comfort,  
Now the long pain's o'er !

## JOY OF TEARS

O baby love, why criest thou  
Upon thy pillow white?  
Knowest thou the meaning of thy tears,  
Through all the long, long night?

O heart of mine, why criest thou  
Through all the long, long night?  
O stem that ceaseless flow of tears  
That blinds thee from the light!

I lay my face by thine, dear bairn,  
Upon the pillow white,  
And weep tears meaningless as thine  
Through all the long, long night!

## THE BABY'S HAND

Despair came to me robed in ashen dress  
From cobweb loom of fate. His pitiless  
And hungry eyes burned upon mine; apart  
His eager lips were; and my throbbing heart  
Stood still, as to fulfill my strong desire,  
He reached a fluid dark in glass of fire.  
"It is oblivion," he gasped. My hand  
I stretched. I felt his breath that hotly fanned  
My face. My parchèd throat cried out to drink  
The opiate sweet — so without pain to sink  
Away forever. Then in the gathering night  
Thy helpless hand, like wandering ray of light,  
Reaching and fluttering toward my heart I saw;  
And the up-swelling of some heavenly law  
Obeying, with one swooning cry, I caught  
My hand back from the goblet bright, and  
sought  
And clasped thine own, with quelled alarm,  
Thy pleading hand, so tiny but so warm!

## MIDNIGHT SONG

My darling baby lies  
Deep in the pillow nest;  
Those wondrous owlet eyes  
Shining their loveliest.

Those eyes are diamonds rare,  
Black diamonds gleaming bright,  
To catch with beckoning flare  
The treasure-hunter's sight.

Two mountain lakes are they,  
Reflecting clearest stars,  
Whose placid, undimmed ray  
No midnight ripple mars.

Twin berries dark that gleam  
Within a shady place ;  
Twin beadlets where the stream  
Stays in its tumbling race.

Pure wells they are that keep  
Secrets no one can solve ;  
Within their mystic deep  
Shadows of thought revolve ;

Or maps to trace sweet nooks  
In the undiscovered land;  
Illuminated books  
No man may understand;

Or forge-fires from whose light  
Creation's secrets spring;  
Or forest circles bright  
Where dancing fairies swing.

The gates are closing — closed;  
The jewel's gleam is dim;  
And clouds stream unopposed  
Over the lake's soft rim;

The music floats afar,  
The page blurs tremblingly;  
And sailing fancies whelmèd are  
Beneath a slumbrous sea.

## TEACHING OF MOTHERHOOD

Child! child!—I spoke the word so soft and  
round,

I sang it, shouted, triumphed in the thought;—  
So heedless playing on that great stop caught  
Humanity's antiphony profound.

For as I made that single note resound,  
Beneath its roll another chimed and sought  
The ear, and in my waiting heart-depths taught  
That heavenly-sweet word 'mother' how to  
sound!

I listened. Soft the notes played on and grew  
To one. Springing within an infinite past  
It touched an infinite future, reconciled  
All peoples who through its revealing knew  
The heart of God. Then on my lips at last  
I felt come quivering the words, "My child!"

## SLUMBER SONG

Fare thee well, my dainty baby,  
Fare thee well to Slumberland!  
Down a glittering dream comes riding,  
Floating on a cloud of amber,  
Gently takes thee by the hand;  
In her magic spells confiding,  
Lures thee to the Land of Slumber;  
Curtains starry eyes so softly,  
Quiets waving hands so deftly,  
Sings a lulling dreamland tune,  
Whispers an unspoken rune,  
Weaves her sleep charms without number,  
Lures thee to the Land of Slumber.

Fare thee well, O sweetest baby,  
Fare thee well, O fare thee well!

## PEACE

When from the wearying war of life  
I seek release,  
I look into my Baby's face,  
And there find peace !

## TREASURE TROVE

O'er my treasure in a casket  
I bend and gloat and dream;  
My heart's enthralled with gazing  
On the gems' entrancing gleam.

There are rubies clear and topaz  
Cream-white and rosy-pink;  
Forget-me-nots of turquoise,  
The fairest gem-set link.

There are pearls, seed pearls, the purest  
That e'er were seen to shine;  
And gold, spun gold, — no finer  
Was ever found in mine.

Wouldst know where lies my treasure,  
My gold and rubies red?  
'Tis just my baby darling,  
A-dream in the cradle bed !

## SOUL ADVENT

And now comes thought and makes a heavenly  
throne

Upon thy brow. Expressions unforeknown,  
Creations new, yet speaking of the past,  
Touch here and there upon thy face, the iast,  
Dear babe, of lines ancestral lost in mist.  
Manifold meanings keep mysterious tryst  
Within the shadows of those wondrous wells  
That are thine eyes; and royal will dispels  
Obscurity, puts all beneath his yoke  
And sends a vivid, energizing stroke  
Down to thy slender shell-tint finger tips.  
A human smile touches thy lovely lips  
With radiance clear shed from immortal life.  
Thou knowest, laughest, grievest; thy tears  
have strife  
With smiles. Thy lips can plead, thine eyes  
reprove,  
Thy small arms press and draw,—do they not  
love?  
O days of babyhood, still lingering,  
Yet pass like pearls a-dropping from the string,  
Irrevocable pass, as twilight fades,

On to the ever duskier growing shades  
Of things that were ! And now in distance dim  
Responsibility and Duty grim  
And wrinkled Care, a trio sad but kind,  
I see draw near. Were not their forms outlined  
Against the light cast on the hills of hope,  
Thou mightest long to turn again and grope  
Back to thy primal home, and sink and hide  
Thy spark of life beneath oblivion's tide.

'Αγαθά

Maybe my baby  
Isn't sweet!  
My pearl of a girl  
Complete!  
The light of her bright  
Eyes clear;  
The tips of her lips  
Just dear!

Maybe my baby  
Can't talk!  
You may say what you may,  
Laugh and mock;  
She replies with her eyes'  
Rhythmic line,  
And she charms with her arms'  
Action fine.

Maybe my baby  
Isn't wise!  
She can speak ancient Greek,  
Latinize;  
Says "ago"! — Really so!  
If you would  
Ask her name, she this claim  
Makes:—"I-good."

## THE CHRIST CHILD

Wonder divine ensphering heaven and earth,  
And calm foreboding of a coming woe,  
And trenchant courage strong for awful stress,  
And buoyant love that fain would lift the lost,  
Dimmed o'er with question, yet in the far depths  
Pregnant with living everlasting yea, —  
This sees each mother in her own child's eyes;  
And this the secret strange and passing sweet  
That piques the ages in the dreaming orbs  
Of Raphael's mother-thronéd, godlike child !

## MOTHER'S PAY

When the babe lies on the heart  
    Cares depart;  
Heavenly peace, heavenly rest  
    Fill the breast  
When the babe lies on the heart.

When I look on baby's face  
    In baby's place,  
Vexing snarls to smoothness run,  
    Magic-spun,  
When I see that peaceful face.

Than queen to people more to thee  
    I joy be;  
Than people to their queen thou'rt more  
    Told o'er and o'er  
In every breath of thine to me.

When thou liest on my heart  
    Hatred's smart  
Turns to sweet; love's soft spell  
    The way knows well  
Through baby's lips to mother's heart.

O'er responsive eyes and lips  
    Sleep's eclipse

Softly falls, breathing bliss  
As I kiss  
The tiny rosy finger tips.

While with thee sweet tryst I keep  
Half asleep,  
In thy silver dream-world boat  
Soft I float  
Over slumber's sacred deep.

Lesser duty's strident scream  
Drops its theme;  
Joy and duty are one code  
Heaven-bestowed,  
While I watch my baby dream.

As I gaze on baby's face  
Angel's grace  
Falls around. Who from home  
Cares to roam  
While she sees the baby's face?

When my babe lies on my heart  
Cares depart;  
Heaven and home by heaven's grace  
Are one place,  
When my babe lies on my heart.

## THE PRINCESS

The Princess holdeth Court today,  
    She with the eyes so blue;  
And all her subjects gather round  
    To offer homage true.

And he on whom her clear glance rests  
    Counts this his happiest day,  
And proudly in his heart he keeps  
    That recognizing ray.

And he on whom her sovereign hand  
    Confers its rose leaf thrill,  
Laughs care away, has courage new  
    To live and conquer still.

But ah! the one that gayest turns  
    Back to the rank and file  
To serve forevermore, is he  
    That wins her dimpling smile.

## TIE OF MOTHERHOOD

In the clear morning air my baby rides  
In royal state, and her proud charioteer  
I happy am to be. And when draws near  
Another train, its pilot's eye confides  
To mine and mine to hers, the love that guides  
Our steps. I greet with reverence sincere  
Her monarch, she greets mine; and so endear  
And bind we mother-hearts whate'er divides.

I love all women! Those who proudly boast  
Their living children, those whose hearts are  
strong

For one unborn, and those whose babes are  
clay.

But oh, those do I love and pity most  
Whose breasts to give their flowing sweetness  
long

To the unquestioning lips, yet never may!

## A MOTHER'S MOOD

To school? O no, my darling boy, not yet!  
I caught him, held him close and would not let  
Him speak. My heart felt then, he clinging so,  
That mingled pain and bliss that mothers  
know.

And while that bobbing head a trice was still,  
A dream flashed through my mind without my  
will.

I saw a backward path with flowers of gold,  
Music and peace, all that the heart could hold;  
A tiny hand was warm within my own;  
Too short, alas! for here the path was done,  
And ever after there went winding two  
Instead of one. I saw my own path grow  
Grayer and ever grayer, downward slope  
Until it reached the fields where shadows grope  
And into search-eluding darkness merge.  
And then I saw my boy's — ah God! diverge;  
I felt his fingers slip from mine; I saw  
Him laughing turn; I felt the cruel law  
Of growth and change crush down on me,  
But him bear up a rocky steep which he  
Went gaily climbing. Then in my swift dream

I saw the lurking serpent's cruel gleam,  
The snare that waits the brave that dare aspire;  
I felt the horror of the flood, the fire;  
I saw the enemy, the blow, the fall,  
The star-crowned height,—then darkness  
shrouded all;  
I felt with swooning heart the farewell kiss.  
Ah God, must mothers bear a pain like this?  
Go not to school, brave boy, but with me stay  
Ever and still forever and a day!

## FIRST FLIGHT

The eagle mother when she thrusts her young  
Out from the eyrie home, knows well that she  
Is near at hand to ward the enemy  
Away, to right the awkward stroke air-flung,  
Swiftly to dart beneath, catch the unstrung  
And wearied flight, and, after, restfully  
In swinging circles bear.—Not thus with me.  
When thou goest forth, dear bairn, my heart  
    is wrung,  
Knowing I cannot save thee shouldst thou fall.  
But ah, if prayer can heaven storm, then must  
Thou be upborne; if love can testify  
By spirit touch, thy loss will I forestall  
With ministry of strength, when thou art thrust  
Out from the nest, thy fledgling wings to try!





## DEPRIVED

He only knows the pride of native land  
Who stands with feet touched by unheeding  
foam

And sees his country's flag afloat from mast  
Of ship that yet shall never bear him home.

He only knows the deepest sweet of home  
Who exiled feels a pain the whole day long  
That pierced his heart when on the morning air  
He heard a strain from his own childhood's  
song.

She only knows the passing love of child  
Who hears some young voice cry and starts  
to run  
And help, but snatched by memory sees the  
place  
Her one child lies, its pain and crying done !

## HEAVEN'S WELCOME

Sweet child-soul, walking slow and earnestly  
Up through heaven's blinding splendor, all  
amazed,

Thy wondrous eyes to infinite heights upraised,  
Oh, in thy heart what tremor must there be,  
Heart that was wont to beat tumultuously  
But yesterday against my own, when dazed  
By touch of strangeness only, thou hast gazed  
Like startled fawn, then swiftly turned to flee  
To thy sure refuge on my breast. Is all  
Forgot, thy cry for cure of mother's kiss,  
All crushed beneath the stroke of death's  
demand?

I wish, I almost pray, that even beyond the  
wall

That circles heaven's glory, thou mayst miss  
The clasping of thy mother's human hand.

## PROSPECT

What rich and ever widening life for thee  
I planned! The long procession of the books,  
The revelations of the quiet nooks  
Of nature where her gems are wont to be,  
The consecration of philosophy,  
And beauty,—in the secret-telling brooks  
And amber peaks and every leaf that looks  
For heaven's rain and shine;—these were to be  
In thy unfolding mind, the fertile seeds  
To blossom and bear fruit in strong desire  
To add new things to life by mental throes,  
Some thought, some knowledge won in chrism  
    of fire,  
Some sweet philanthropy whence ever flows  
The outward-circling influence of good deeds.

## MUSIC OF EARTH AND HEAVEN

And music! In my dreams that on before  
Went ever pressing, I could plainly hear  
Thy childhood's trembling touch delight my ear;  
I saw thy slender fingers o'er and o'er  
The lesson con, thine eyes the master's score  
Study; the interweaving notes as clear  
As crystal came, as round as breath-blown  
sphere.

I heard thy voice its tender sweetness pour  
To bless the home with song. O thou didst fill  
The lonely house with music till it seemed  
Like summer morning radiance soft and still  
That bathes the land with bliss! Such dreams  
I dreamed.

But now the music thou dost hear and make  
No echo in my earth-dulled ear can wake!

## SCHOOL OF HEAVEN

What teachers wilt thou have where thou art  
gone,  
With tender touch and piercing kindly eyes!  
What heavenly lore, what scrolls of mysteries  
To con! All cloudy veils will be withdrawn  
From purposes divine, and a clear dawn  
Will shine for thee, unfolding poesies  
Of infinite and cosmic harmonies,  
Where love and law, and law and love move on  
Together ever, clasping hands. On thee  
Shall ne'er be laid doubt's paralyzing hand.  
Angels, archangels, waiting, listening, stand  
Thy trial of the heavenly speech to see;  
Thy wise young questions will have answers  
meet,  
Not half truths dim, but certainty complete.

## BLEST KNOWLEDGE

And doest thou see me now, dear one? Dost  
know

How silent is the air thou didst make glad?  
Dost know how I stand weeping, tortured, mad  
With grief, because thou art not here? If, so,  
Thou wouldst be happier, if 'twould bestow  
Another rose of bliss, if it would add  
A single bud of joy for thee where clad  
In rainbows thou dost wandering go  
Among new flowers in heavenly gardens, then  
I pray that thou mayst know how much I miss  
Thy presence here where in the dark I grope!  
But if in thy high realms of rapture when  
Thou thinkst of me thou'lt lose one thrill of  
bliss,  
Then that thou dost not know I almost hope!

## THE SAFE SLEEP

I sat among the mothers and I heard  
Them, counting o'er their blisses, say  
The sweetest, happiest moment in the day  
Was when the children went to sleep. Deferred  
Until the last, it was the best. No word  
Could tell the quiet joy, recounted they,  
When after all the wild and noisy play  
The wee ones in the cradle were, unstirred  
By aught except a breathing soft that fell  
And rose like gentlest waves. There one  
    could think  
Them safe at last! I heard in anguish deep,  
And thought, O why can we not deem it well,  
Yes, and a bliss, when our beloved ones sink  
Into that last, that deepest, safest sleep!

## VOICES

I hear soft sounds that haunt the rooms where  
thou

Didst live. At night a breathing low; then  
peace

Flows in. By day a cry from where caprice  
Has led thee, and I start to help. And now  
Thy gurgling laugh that always smoothed the  
brow!

And in the morn when I in sleep's release—  
Moment so exquisite I almost cease  
My breathing—turn to see, adoring, how  
Thy eyelids slowly lift, how comes the gaze  
Of recognition veiled, then, O the burst  
Of opening joy that blossoms in thine eyes!—  
The thought flits out but memory waylays  
And strikes it down. A thousand undispersed  
And haunting voices bring a thousand lies!

## THE SPIRIT'S VEIL

What are these sounds and voices that transform

The stillness? Like the tinkling of soft bells,  
Of wandering flocks in shadowy mountain  
dells,

That fill the tremulous air and storm  
The wanderer's ear and welling upward swarm  
A chorus dim, so that he scarcely tells  
Whether 'tis fairy chimes with circling spells  
From far beneath, or that a potent charm  
Has caught the spheric music of the stars,  
Drawn down the song before which angels  
bow.

What are you, voices that my heart assail?  
Are you but ghosts of moments that the bars  
Of time shut back? Or is it, darling, thou,  
Trying thy arts to pierce my spirit's veil?

## THE FINAL DESIRE

If at the end I could one single day  
But feel thy beating breast against my own,  
But hear thy voice's pearl-like human tone,  
But know the warmth again, the sweet lips' pay  
Of kiss-toll, that best child and mother play,  
The comfort fathomless, that thou alone,  
Sweetest, couldst bring, all pain that I have  
known

For thee, how gladly would I suffer, yea,  
A thousand years, each year a thousand fold !  
This *via dolorosa* would I bound  
To enter, and to travel calmly o'er,  
Supported by the vision glad foretold,  
Of that one day with thee! O then, the round  
Being o'er, to die and sleep forevermore!

## THE VISIT OF SORROW

When to my lips the chalices of gold  
And pearl were passed as wingèd day and night  
At life's high banquet served their joyous rite,  
My listening heart with prescience keen, fore-  
told

The step of Sorrow, far but nearing. "Hold!  
She comes; prepare," it whispered. "When  
her blight

Falls here," I said, "I will be ready; fright  
Shall not benumb, nor terror strike me cold."—  
Yet at thy knock, O Sorrow, I would fain,  
The lights gone out, have stayed to breathe  
that air

So sweet. O friends, have patience if ye may;  
Grant respite short; then I shall courage gain  
To take her hand, and to go forth will bear!  
But—just a little longer let me stay!



III



## FOUR CHILDREN

Four children have I loved. Like four-fold star  
They cluster in love's empyrean. Ah,  
The visions conjured by their names! They are  
Queen Bess, Queen Mab, and Dor' and Agatha.

The Queens were sisters. Bess with eyes  
a-dream

Spun tales of knights a-tilt by her play desk.  
And Mab I see hold forth the lantern beam  
To light the way, a picture Remembrantesque.

Dor' works at home with all her might and  
main,

And fairy-like sets round the tea things for  
The company, and helps to entertain  
With dainty grace. Great help is she, is Dor'!

And Agatha awaits in listening pose  
My call. Chin-deep in flowers I see her stand,  
Her bonnet back, while o'er a mountain rose,  
Like poising bird, hovers her flower-like hand.

These were the four. Ah dreams that flash  
and go

Upon the dark! Ah ruthless tides of years  
That down life's gentle valleys sweep and flow  
And leave but memoried ruins, tender tears!

Now Bess in great Elizabeth is lost,  
A champion of the last, most bold  
World-wide reform; and 'neath her woman's  
breast  
Beats staunch and true a woman's heart of  
gold.

And gentle Mabelle all unconsciously  
O'er the dark path a braver lights now lifts;  
In her wide eyes broods life's great mystery,  
And in her hands she bears life's precious gifts.

Dor' answers not. Her name is Dorothy,  
So please you! She has found her Self, sur-  
veyed  
The boundless circle, and her dignity  
Repels the profane touch. O sweet, sweet  
maid!

Gone, gone, the three, each to her life's career,  
Winding away from where our pathways  
crossed;

Veiled and transformed in the encompassing  
sphere

Of thought and circumstance, the Child is lost.

And Agatha? She drank one draft was drawn  
From the enchanted wells of infinite sleep;  
The charm worked; and my memory-haloed  
one

Ever a laughing, dreaming child I keep;

A child that comforts in my brooding thought,  
That, visioned among flowers that rejoice  
In brightness which her loveliness has brought,  
Stands ever waiting, listening for my voice.

World's children grow up, into life are whirled;  
She ever stays, pours radiance soft and mild  
To bless my way; a link with the whole world  
Of children is my own transfigured child.

## THE SLAVE CHILDREN

A traveler came home from his travels  
And this is the story he told:

He once found a boat in an inlet  
By an African strand of gold;  
He stepped on the deck of the vessel  
And looked down into the hold;

He looked and saw in the darkness  
Shining like starlight cold,  
The eyes of hundreds of children  
Looking out from the hold;

Of hundreds of dark-browed children,  
This was the story he told,  
Torn away from their dusky mothers,  
Trapped and stolen and sold.

Their wondering eyes were pressing,  
By innocence made bold,  
The soul's immortal question  
From the depths of that slave-boat's hold.

Their asking eyes seemed embattled  
Like bayonets in line  
To stab to the hearts of monarchs —  
Ruling by right divine!

O kings and princes, how like you  
This story of slaves and gold?

The traveler I have forgotten,  
His stories of woe and mirth;  
But the eyes of those little children  
Follow me over the earth.

Kings sit on their thrones in splendor,  
On their thrones majestic and old;  
They reckon not those human children  
To the Arabic slaveship sold.

And queens that are mothers are reigning;  
Their towers have jewels untold;  
What care they for black mothers' children  
In cargoes bound and sold!

And sweet Justice still sits blinded,  
The scales tipped by greed and gold;  
But alas, for those eyes of children  
Looking out from the hold!

O listen, O listen, sweet princes,  
The story my traveler told!

## A CHILD

How thou dost give, O fervid five-year-old !  
With what wild fury dost thou throw the wine  
And fire of thy keen spirit on the air !  
Mad spend-thrift of thy heart's and lip's rare  
    gold,  
What gusts of passion, wailings of despair,  
Untrammeled joy and woe in flashes fine!

Thy moods bewitch; but yet a lurking fear  
Foreboding cries. Entrancing butterfly,  
I weep the tearing of thy tender wings!  
Poor little ship starting with hope so clear,  
Beyond the foam-path where thy white sail  
    sings,  
I see the storm-wrack rising on the sky !

## GOD AND THE CHILDREN

Take my children,  
My poor children, in from off the street!  
You who dwell in homes you did not build,  
By hearth fires that you did not light;  
You who reap from fields you have not tilled,  
By human artifice of right;  
You who sit and comfortably eat  
What came by sweat of others' brows, not  
yours;  
You whose brains with myriad plannings reel  
For gain that never happiness ensures;  
You who when you give not calmly steal  
My children's portion, steal my children's meat;  
O take my children in from off the street!

Do you not see them there outside the pane,  
My children!—standing up in rows?  
Their eyes show blue-ringed in the globe-  
light's rain  
Of radiance that softly flows  
Out through the dark; more generous than they  
That lit the lamps, it folds them in its warm

Embrace, it clasps them to its glowing heart.  
Too small to think a vengeful thought of harm,  
Too young to reason that their rightful part  
Is rudely reft from them, it is more sad  
To see them shivering bask in the unwarming  
    bloom  
Of light that streams out from the rich-hued  
    room,  
Than if they clenched their scawny fists, and  
    mad  
With bitter gall of hatred turned away.

My children's hands were made as satin soft  
As yours; my children's lips could grow  
As round and flower-like as those aloft  
There in your nursery, aglow  
With light, lace-hung, immaculately neat.  
Were they but daily nourished with sweet milk,  
'Twould woo the rounding curves to come on  
    cheek  
And limb; could they too rest on beds of silk,  
'Twould give sleep time to cleanse away the  
    reek  
Clouding their skin, to make the rose hues rise,

And fill their veins with pure blood keen as  
wine;

Time to paint out the horror from their eyes,  
Time to touch in the sparkle there. In line  
Unlovely hang my children's curls, all stiff  
With frozen threads of gutter slime; but if  
By human tender hands they once could be  
Touched with the wonder-working alchemy  
Of your soft babies' fragrant bath, so sweet  
And wholesome, lo, their gold would instant  
shine!

O take my children in from off the street!

Take my children, you whose daughter fair  
Has grown a lily tall, whose son  
Now matches you in height; and you that wear  
The long night out with tears that run  
In streams that hide my children on the street,  
In bitter streams for those who in eclipse  
Of death bowed down their shining promise; so  
Greet now my children; on their unkissed lips  
The debt for blessed presences you owe  
Whose heavenly chrism you did not rightly see  
Until they took their flight, lay reverently.

My children's feet by winter's grip made numb,  
Might rosy be as were your babe's before  
You laid them white away. O let them come  
And scamper up your stairs! My children's sore  
And frost-scarred fingers cling upon the bar  
Outside; O call them in and let them beat  
The moan back in the place where moanings  
are!

O take my children in from off the street!

And you O childless women, you who were  
Not dowered with earth's best blessedness,  
That final comfort-source, the stir  
Of life beneath the heart, the press  
Of soft lips to the breast, yet not denied  
The might divine that swells within the heart  
Of those that store their love: O do not draw  
A respite from the deadening of the part  
That feeds sweet womanhood's full blossoming  
law,

Nor let the heaped floods leap their high-built  
bounds.

Scan not forever loneliness' black deeps,  
Lone hearts, but know that clear content that  
sounds

The sorest woe. O from this cup that keeps  
My heart-pain down, drink and be satisfied!

When 'neath the serried lights the snow clouds  
spin,

Listen and hear my children's cries!

The people pass. They still the voice within  
By tossing pence that pauperize.—

Why should my children find upon the street  
Their downward-pointing only school, my boys  
Grow foul, my little girls be made to hear  
And lisp hell's whisper through the highway's  
noise?—

My lady laps her fur, and leaves them there,  
And by her fire forgets.—With them I cry  
Outside, my little ones! I call, O why  
Are hearts so hard, sweet impulses so fleet!  
I cry to you, O hearts of stone, to break  
And melt; to you my elder children, take  
My little children in from off the street!

## AN INTERPRETATION

Hundreds of pale, unfathered children swarm  
Upon that catholic breast, the city square;  
'Tis pestilence that breathes upon their lips,  
And 'neath their eyelids wolves of famine glare.

These be the bubbles on life's turbid sea,  
The last despairing, speechless speaking  
    breath,  
That show where the unmothering mothers  
    gasped,  
And one by one sank to unnoted death.

## TWO WOMEN

One stood with eager eyes in thronged arcade,  
Awaiting prey and prey herself to be;  
One walked with arm in lawful clasp and made  
A shining wake upon the street's black sea.

Each one with gaze direct shot bitterness  
Into the other's heart; and one I saw  
Go strangle life unborn, one went to press  
Her virtue's store down famine's yawning maw.

Each for mere food and raiment low did bow  
Her pauper heart, a well-appointed link to be  
In man's consummate social scheme. Canst  
    thou  
O man of woman born, a difference see?

## TO A DEFENCELESS ONE

O would I were an eagle swift;  
Then on my outspread wing  
Thee would I gently stoop to lift  
And to thy home-land bring!

O would I were a gallant knight  
To ride forth to the fray;  
Upon my sword-point heaven's light,  
Thy ravager to slay!

O would I were a castle strong;  
There in its inmost keep  
Would I protect thee from all wrong,  
And lull to restful sleep!

O would I were a mother fair  
To clasp thee in my arm;  
There shouldst thou sob out thy despair  
Upon my bosom warm!

## CALVIN'S REPROACH

Calvin, I have somewhat laid up 'gainst thee!  
Not for those troops of children unelect  
Thou wouldst make wander wailing in a  
wrecked

And desolate limbo, but for that company  
Of living mothers on whose spirits free  
'Twas thou didst clinch thy clamps, that didst  
project

An added bitter in their tears unchecked,  
Force the dark doubt in their extremity!

See the long sorrowing train with heads bent  
low

For thy hard words! Thine eyes must look on  
them,

Their hot pain must draw slowly through thy  
heart,

That anguished helpless question thou must  
know

That rises in their eyes thee to condemn,—  
Else shalt thou never have thy just desert!

## GOD'S PATIENCE

O God, dost thou not see thy sweet world lies  
Beaten, struck down, and wrong thy power  
defies?

Not see that bleeding fall thy strong and brave?  
How long, how long, O God! O look and save!  
Into engulfing darkness flees my sister fair,  
Hounded by want and pain, clutched by despair.  
My child,—mine, thine!—here strangled lies;  
None smites the slayer nor heeds it when she  
dies.

I see the loved and lovely downward whirled —  
My God, my God, I cry, thy world, thy world!

Child, eons long I waited since my world  
A seething chaos into dark was hurled.  
Thousands of weary years I've nursed and led  
Its faltering steps on toward a firmer tread.  
Millions I yet will watch for flower and fruit  
Until the evil grovels, throttled, mute.  
Take thou my hand; my trusty helper be;  
Look once into my heart and wait with me.

## THE BABIES IN THE STREET

Had thy quick ear, O God, to earth been turned,  
Above the psalm intoned and pealing bells,  
Thou hadst a soft pervasive wail discerned;  
It is the babies, God, the babies sweet,  
A-dying in the street!

Their eyelids lift and looking up they see  
Thy steadfast stars that sing of steadfast law;  
Their eyelids fall, the stars of destiny  
Never again those wondering eyes to meet,  
A-fading in the street.

Because thou couldst no better token find  
To show thy heart, thou didst by mother-love  
Our love entreat. Deep-bosomed rest enshrined  
In arms of mothers clasped unfailingly  
Should thy dear comfort be.

But mother love has failed and mothers thrust  
Their babes out in the night and leave them  
there.

E'en should theirs fail, thou saidst thine we  
should trust;  
Yet on the babies' heads the cold rains beat,  
A-dying in the street.

Virtue of women, choice commodity,  
Buys gewgaws, sense delight and eye-flash  
power,  
With breath of babes that did not ask to be,  
Soft breath of babes that know nor fear nor  
strife,  
Yet have not asked for life!

Virtue of women, fate's most cherished pledge,  
Forfeit to grinding greed, pawn of despair,  
This dainty morsel dulls starvation's edge;  
Poured out with tender life in rain and sleet  
To melt upon the street.

Yet let the tender life sink down to death,  
Like water spilt and lost. 'Tis better so.  
And do thou treasure, God, the babies' breath  
If thou hast built among the realms of bliss  
A treasure house for this!

Far better thus. Let them not live to see  
Their mother's shame dovetail the ancient  
scheme  
Of human life, her pang its blood-stained key.  
Yet O to see them lying there so sweet,  
A-dying in the street!

If but their veritable fathers saw  
Them there, the gutter-cradled ones!—their  
wrap  
Undainty paper soiled and whipped, the raw  
Night breezes knifing their soft feet  
In foulness of the street.

Where are the men that boldly stand and say  
The unquivering word, hurl it in devils' teeth,  
No child of theirs rots out its little day  
In slime of slums? Cut through their lethargy  
And bring them here to see.

Send down thy ladies fair, reposeful, clean,  
Half-sisters only to the forfeit clan;  
Let madame on the velvet cushion lean  
And glimpse between the wheels familiar eyes.  
God, pity her surprise!

Send down thy champions prosperous and  
well-fed,  
That never knew the watering of the lips  
At hunger's pinch, the spasm at sight of bread;  
And while to peace the babies' breathings sink,  
Let them stand by and think!

And send thy troops of pitying angels, such  
Alone will cherish these poor children, these  
Whose blue and stiffening lips the blissful touch  
Of human mother's breast shall never meet,  
A-dying in the street.

Angels for all their tears can never right  
The wrong done to these unreplying babes;  
Yet let them weep until their grief shall smite  
Hard hearts that leave the babies there so  
sweet  
To die upon the street.

## MOTHER AND CHILD

Transfigured through a sweeping rain of tears,  
I see a single happy childhood day  
That shines amid the shadows of past years  
    With sparkling ray;

The day I heard my mother's thimble rap  
Upon the window pane to call me in,  
And ran to lean upon her bounteous lap,  
    Her praise to win;

And looked up to my heaven in her face  
And felt those clearest wells of living light  
Pour out their willing floods of gentle grace,  
    My choice birthright;

And for one moment passionate was held  
Against a heart whose beating pulse I heard  
Beneath the fragrant dress. My own heart  
    swelled,  
With wonder stirred.

This one dear memory I have of her  
Who soon thereafter grew so heavenly bright,  
She slipped away into a glorious blur  
Of dazzling light;

And left me in the dark to grope around,  
Trembling and stumbling in an unknown land,  
Falling and wounded, with my hurts not bound  
By her dear hand.

O mother, mother, many a time have I,  
A woman grown, longed to pour out my grief  
Upon thy breast, with childhood's tears to buy  
An hour's relief!

O once again upon the folds to lean —  
Soft flowers upon a ground of ivory white —  
Of that dear dress, to feel thine eyes serene  
Pour down their light!

To have thy tender hand laid on my hair —  
In all the earth no other hand's caress  
With thine could I unblasphemous compare —  
    Lifted to bless;

So soft its palm, so cool, so dry. and O  
So firm its loving clasp! its arching line  
Of veins I see upon my own, and know  
    Myself for thine.

Yet other morns and eves I dimly trace  
On memory's oblivion, in whose fair  
And glowing scenes I do not catch thy face,  
    Yet thou wast there,

A presence all-pervading; just thy law  
And sweet thy spoken word; so that thou art  
To me today in emblem without flaw  
    God's mind and heart.

There were the nights, dear mother, when we  
played !

What wild delight! A gay papoose, perched  
high

On father's back I came, madly afraid  
Thou wouldst not buy!

O ne'er again by regnant state or church  
By mace or jewelled crown or sword or pen,  
Shall I so guarded be from hostile search  
As I was then;

When hidden behind the wide-enfolding tent  
Of thy soft dress, I calmly did await  
A fell marauding brother, keenly bent  
To seal my fate!

Then there were mornings when curled on the  
floor

I figured with horse-chestnuts brown a den  
Of lions fierce, or battles streaming gore —  
'Twas war-time then—

Struck down full many a foe debased and vile,  
And lived through many a life heroic, merged  
Through epochs of thy interrupting smile  
    When love o'ersurged.

Among the treasures of that shattered past  
I keep a pillow cover worn and soft  
On which thy darling cheek has lain. O fast  
    And thick fall oft

My bitter tears when on its yielding gloss  
I lay my weary head and call again  
Those troops of childhood spirits from across  
    The gulf of pain!

Those dreams and plays are gone, and on my  
    brow  
Has rested heavily for many a year  
The double weight of pain and care. And now,  
    O mother dear,

Weary of drifting ever on the wild  
Tempestuous courses of a starless sea,  
Homesick and heavensick, thy tired child  
    Would come to thee;

Would come to thee, O mother, mother dear,  
Where'er thou art, in what far lonely space,  
Knowing my home is there where shines thy  
    clear  
    And radiant face;

Knowing that there upon thy changeless breast  
I shall weep out the tangle and the smart,  
And find a heavenly cure for my unrest,  
    My lost child-heart!

## TO THE SMILING PICTURE OF AGATHA

What would you ask of me, expectant eyes,  
Eyes of my child beloved?  
Those radiant dreamings of the hour when thou  
Didst lie upon my arm, those prophecies —  
Where have they gone? Does my heart fail  
me now?

Ah do not ask, O sweet, O heavenly eyes,  
Eyes of my child beloved! —  
But I confess; yes, in the dark I grope!  
Yet would I never lose your dear replies,  
Would come to you for test, for faith, for hope!

What would you say to me, demanding eyes,  
Eyes of my child beloved?  
Your challenge before every portal stands,  
Flashes a truth 'neath every sly disguise,  
And leads me back with gentlest countermands.

Speak to me, tell me, dear, reproving eyes,  
Eyes of my child beloved!  
With my despairs your courage interweave.  
"There is a Fatherhood, whoe'er denies,  
A kinship for all human souls that breathe!"

Why do you smile at me, O shining eyes,  
Eyes of my child beloved?  
"All's well; to thee can come no touch of harm,  
If thou but keep those dreamings of the skies  
That blest the hours when I lay on thine arm."



## CONTENTS

Fatherhood, 7

|               |                            |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Part I</b> | To Angelo, 11              |
|               | The Conflict, 13           |
|               | The Voice, 14              |
|               | The Response, 17           |
|               | The Human Cry, 19          |
|               | A Night Thought, 20        |
|               | Songs in the Night, 21     |
|               | Lullaby-Days, 23           |
|               | The Last Hour, 24          |
|               | First Baby Song, 25        |
|               | Joy of Tears, 26           |
|               | The Baby's Hand, 27        |
|               | Midnight Song, 28          |
|               | Teaching of Motherhood, 30 |
|               | Slumber Song, 31           |
|               | Peace, 32                  |
|               | Treasure Trove, 33         |
|               | Soul Advent, 34            |
|               | Agatha, 36                 |

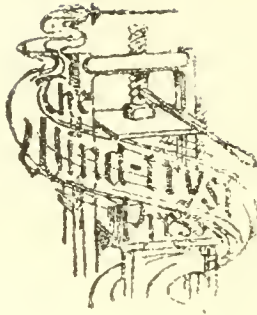
The Christ Child, 37  
Mother's Pay, 38  
The Princess, 40  
Tie of Motherhood, 41  
A Mother's Mood, 42  
First Flight, 44

Part II Deprived, 47  
Heaven's Welcome, 48  
Prospect, 49  
Music of Earth and Heaven, 50  
School of Heaven, 51  
The Safe Sleep, 52  
Blest Knowledge, 53  
Voices, 54  
The Spirit's Veil, 55  
The Final Desire, 56  
The Visit of Sorrow, 57

Part III Four Children, 61  
The Slave Children, 64  
A Child, 67  
God and the Children, 68

An Interpretation, 73  
Two Women, 74  
To a Defenceless One, 75  
Calvin's Reproach, 76  
God's Patience, 77  
The Babies in the Street, 78  
Mother and Child, 83  
To the Smiling Picture of Agatha, 89





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